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Investigation Of 3D Printing Parameters On The Mechanical Properties Of Polymer Composites

Praveen[1*], Rajeev Saha[2], Sandeep Grover[3]
[1*,2,3]Mechanical Engineering, J.C. Bose University of Science and Technology, YMCA, Faridabad,
EMAIL: praveenchch@gmail.com[1], rajeevsaha@gmail.com[2], groversandeep@hotmail.com[3]

Abstract
Experimental investigation of 3D printing parameters on the mechanical behaviour of polymer composites is imperative for the optimization of material performance for additive manufacturing. In the present study, the effects of influential Fused Deposition Modelling (FDM) parameters such as layer height, infill density, raster direction, nozzle temperature, and printing speed on tensile strength, flexural characteristics, and impact resistance are examined. Further, the contribution of reinforcement materials like carbon fibers, glass fibers, graphene, and boron nitride and thermosetting agents like phenolic resins in reinforcing the structural properties of printed composites is investigated. The research also assesses the optimization techniques such as computational modelling, machine learning algorithms, and post-processing treatments to address issues such as anisotropic behaviour and weak interlayer bonding. Results show that the optimization of printing parameters and reinforcement materials greatly enhances mechanical performance, allowing for wider applications in automotive, aerospace, and biomedical engineering. Recent advances and challenges in thermoplastic reinforced thermosetting polymer composites for various applications also being discussed. Future studies should aim at hybrid reinforcements and green materials for greater efficiency and durability in 3D-printed polymer composites.
Keywords: *3D printing, polymer composites, mechanical properties, Fused Deposition Modelling (FDM), reinforcement materials, printing parameters, additive manufacturing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The swift development of additive manufacturing (AM), more specifically three-dimensional (3D) printing, has had a profound impact on the area of polymer composites, providing novel opportunities for personalized fabrication and increased material properties [1]. 3D printing allows for layer-by-layer polymer composite deposition with the ability to produce intricate geometries that would otherwise be impossible using conventional manufacturing methods. Among the different 3D printing techniques, fused deposition modelling (FDM) is most common because it is easy to find, inexpensive, and can be used to print a broad assortment of polymeric materials. Still, the mechanical properties of parts printed by FDM are largely influenced by a number of process parameters such as layer thickness, infill percentage, raster orientation, nozzle temperature, print velocity, and cooling rate [2]. Knowledge of the impact of these parameters on the mechanical properties of polymer composites is essential to enhance structural performance, provide reliability, and widen the application of 3D-printed materials in engineering.

1.1 Influence of 3D Printing Parameters on Mechanical Properties

The mechanical properties of 3D-printed polymer composites, including tensile strength, flexural strength, impact resistance, and interlayer adhesion, are intrinsically anisotropic because of the layer-by-layer deposition characteristic of the process [3]. Different studies have shown that it is possible to control these properties by varying process parameters. For example, higher infill density enhances tensile strength but can also result in increased material usage and longer print time [4]. Also important is layer height, with decreasing layer heights promoting interfacial bonding between layers and hence better structural integrity at the expense of longer manufacturing time. Raster orientation, or material deposition pattern, also influences strength distribution, some orientations providing improved resistance to imposed loads compared to others [5].Temperature-dependent parameters, i.e., extrusion temperature and bed temperature, have direct influence on the flow ability of polymers and adhesion between layers. Extrusion temperature increase results in improved bonding and decreased void formation, thus improving the overall mechanical performance of the printed component [6]. Elevated temperatures, however, can cause material degradation and warping, particularly in semi-crystalline polymers. Print speed, which is another significant parameter, influences the cooling rate and solidification of the extruded polymer. Fast print speeds can lead to inadequate bonding and higher porosity, while low speeds enhance layer fusion but can cause thermal distortions as a result of extended exposure to heat. Cooling rates also have a significant influence on the crystallization behaviour of semi-crystalline polymers, affecting mechanical stability and dimensional accuracy as well [7].

1.2 Effect of Temperature and Print Speed

Studies on composite reinforcement techniques in 3D printing have been on the rise, with an emphasis on the use of fillers like carbon fibres, glass fibres, graphene, and boron nitride nanoparticles to improve mechanical properties [8]. Carbon fibre-reinforced polymers (CFRPs) and glass fibre-reinforced polymers (GFRPs) have shown enhanced tensile and flexural properties because of their high stiffness and load-carrying capacity [9]. Research has indicated that the addition of grapheme Nano platelets enhances fracture toughness and thermal stability in printed composites. Nonetheless, difficulties persist in obtaining uniform dispersion and appropriate alignment of these reinforcements in the polymer matrix, which influences the final material properties [10]. In addition, hybrid reinforcement methods, which use a combination of various reinforcements, have been proven to be a successful method of enhancing the multifunctional performance of 3D-printed composites. For example, the combination of carbon fibers and graphene Nano platelets produces higher mechanical and electrical properties, making the composites ideal for structural and electronic purposes [11]. The relationship between reinforcement type, orientation, and distribution must be further studied to maximize mechanical performance.

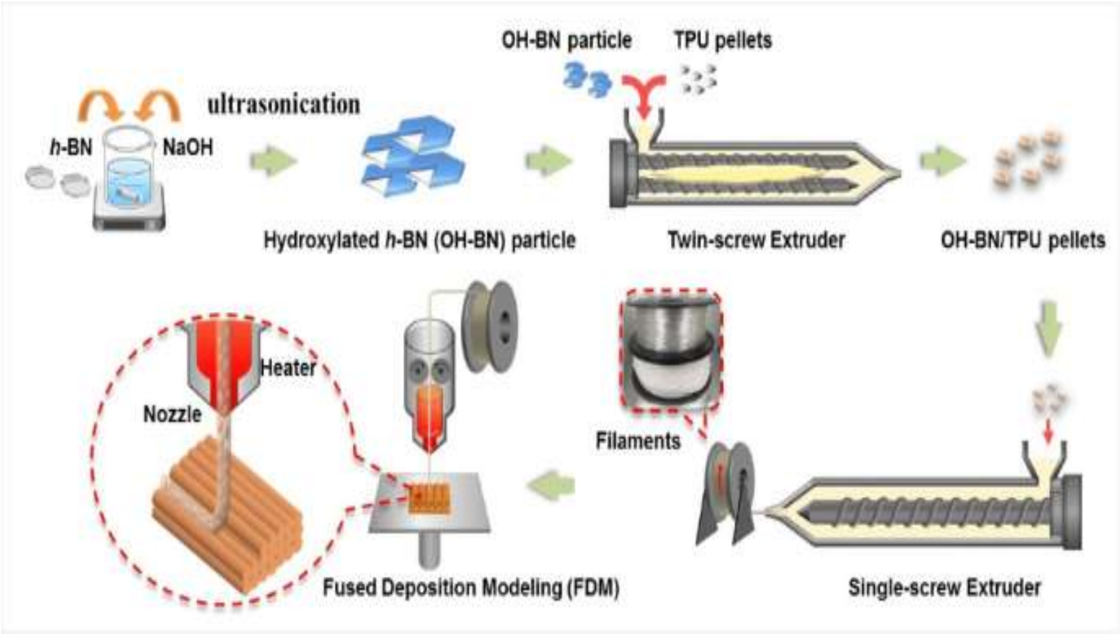

Figure 1. Schematic of the full preparation procedure of the OH-BN/TPU and h-BN/TPU filaments and their 3D-printed composites.

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The given figure shows the processing of hydroxylated hexagonal boron nitride (OH-BN) reinforced thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) composites via extrusion and Fused Deposition Modelling (FDM) 3D printing.

1.3 Reinforcement Strategies for Enhanced Mechanical Properties

The mechanical properties of polymer composites manufactured using Fused Deposition Modelling (FDM) are significantly improved through the incorporation of suitable reinforcement materials. As the layer-by-layer deposition in FDM tends to induce anisotropic behavior and weak interlayer bonding, reinforcement strategies are crucial to enhance tensile strength, flexural modulus, impact resistance, and dimensional stability. Researchers have explored various types of reinforcements including fibers, nanoparticles, and hybrid fillers, each contributing uniquely to the structural integrity and multifunctionality of the printed parts.

One of the most established reinforcement strategies involves the use of fibrous materials. Short fibers such as carbon fibers (CFs) and glass fibers (GFs) are commonly blended with thermoplastic matrices to enhance their stiffness and load-bearing capacity. Carbon fibers, in particular, exhibit high tensile modulus and low density, enabling significant improvement in mechanical performance with minimal weight penalty. Studies have shown that carbon fiber-reinforced PLA (CFR-PLA) composites can exhibit a tensile strength increase of up to 50% compared to neat PLA, due to improved load transfer and internal bonding [12].

In addition to conventional fibers, recent research has increasingly focused on the incorporation of nano-reinforcements such as graphene nanoplatelets (GNPs), carbon nanotubes (CNTs), silica nanoparticles, and boron nitride nanosheets. These nanofillers possess high surface area-to-volume ratios, superior aspect ratios, and excellent mechanical and thermal properties, making them ideal candidates for multifunctional composites. For instance, graphene nanoplatelets, even at low weight percentages, have demonstrated considerable enhancement in fracture toughness, electrical conductivity, and thermal stability of polymer matrices [13].

Another promising strategy involves the development of hybrid reinforcements, which combine two or more types of fillers to exploit their synergistic effects. For example, the combination of carbon fibers and graphene in a PLA matrix can simultaneously enhance tensile strength, electrical conductivity, and thermal management, making such composites suitable for electronic casings, sensors, and structural components. These hybrid systems require careful consideration of filler orientation, volume fraction, and processing parameters to achieve optimal results.

Finally, to further strengthen interfacial bonding between the polymer and the reinforcement phase, researchers have employed surface modification techniques. These include chemical treatments like silane coupling, plasma surface activation, and grafting functional groups onto fibers or nanoparticles. Such approaches improve wetting, adhesion, and stress transfer across the matrix-reinforcement interface, which directly translates into improved mechanical behavior [14].

1.4 Optimization Challenges and Computational Approaches

The fabrication of polymer composites through 3D printing involves a complex interplay of material properties, process parameters, and environmental conditions. Achieving optimal mechanical performance—such as tensile strength, flexural modulus, and impact resistance—requires precise control over variables including printing temperature, layer height, infill density, print speed, and raster orientation [15]. One of the major challenges in optimization lies in the multi-objective nature of the problem, where improving one mechanical property may adversely affect another. For instance, increasing infill density can enhance tensile strength but also increase material consumption and printing time, leading to trade-offs that must be carefully balanced.

Another critical challenge is the interdependency between printing parameters and composite microstructure. Variations in thermal gradients during printing can lead to residual stresses, warping, or weak interlayer adhesion, significantly affecting mechanical properties. Similarly, the orientation and dispersion of reinforcing fillers—whether thermosetting or thermoplastic—can interact nonlinearly with printing parameters, making experimental optimization both time-consuming and resource-intensive [16]. Additionally, the anisotropic behavior of 3D-printed composites, arising from layer-by-layer deposition, introduces further complexity in predicting performance under multi-axial loading conditions.

Multi-objective optimization algorithms such as Genetic Algorithms (GA), Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO), and Response Surface Methodology (RSM) are often integrated with computational simulations to identify the best combination of process parameters for targeted mechanical performance. These algorithms account for competing objectives, such as maximizing strength while minimizing print time or material usage, and can navigate large design spaces efficiently. Furthermore, digital twins of 3D-printed composites are increasingly being employed, offering a real-time virtual replica of the fabrication process that dynamically updates predictions based on sensor feedback, thereby facilitating adaptive control and continual optimization.

1.5 Challenges and Future Directions

In spite of the progress, there are shortcomings with the mechanical behaviour of 3D-printed polymer composites. One key concern is the inherent anisotropy resulting from poor interlayer bonding, which limits mechanical strength in the direction of building [17]. This limitation is currently being overcome through the development of new printing approaches, such as multi-directional printing, hybrid AM methods, and in-situ curing processes that enhance interlayer bonding and structural homogeneity [20]. Another limitation is the development of residual stresses in printed parts, which causes warping, delamination, and size inaccuracies. Controlled cooling approaches, real-time monitoring of process parameters, and post-processing treatments like annealing and chemical smoothing are some attempts to counter these effects. The future trends in the area include the combination of adaptive manufacturing systems and smart control algorithms to improve reproducibility and consistency in composite structures printed. Machine learning-based parameter optimization, real-time sensing, and feedback control have the potential to realize better mechanical properties in 3D-printed polymeric composites. In addition, research into bio-based and recyclable composites is consistent with sustainability targets, encouraging the use of environmentally friendly additive manufacturing technology for a range of engineering applications.

The incorporation of multi-material printing technology is another newly developing field of interest, wherein various polymers and reinforcements may be mixed into a single print job to fabricate functionally graded materials (FGMs). This technique can provide tailored mechanical properties in different sections of an element, achieving better performance for applications involving differential material properties. Advances in nanotechnology have also enabled the creation of self-healing polymer composites, which can heal micro cracks automatically, thus increasing the life of 3D-printed components [18].

Aim of the study

1. To examine the effects of major 3D printing parameters on mechanical characteristics of polymer composites.
2. To achieve optimized print conditions for improved mechanical performance of polymer composites.
3. To explore the potential of reinforcement materials in enhancing the structural performance of 3D-printed polymer composites.
4. To investigate new techniques for conquering anisotropy and residual stress in 3D-printed composites.

In summary, the mechanical characteristics of 3D-printed polymer composites are largely dictated by printing parameters, composition of the material, and reinforcement methodologies. Their optimization is key to guaranteeing structural integrity, performance reliability, and expanding areas of application in engineering and manufacturing industries. There is a need for ongoing research work to resolve prevailing challenges, advance material design protocols, and formulate novel solutions for next-generation fabrication of polymer composites. The convergence of computational software, machine learning, and eco-friendly materials promises to propel additive manufacturing technologies to new heights, and 3D-printed composites could be a viable option for high-performance applications in the future.

The research begins with an Abstract highlighting the aim, experimental setup, and major findings of optimizing parameters of 3D printing in polymer composites. In the Introduction, we highlight the importance of optimizing nozzle temperature, layer thickness, and print speed for greater mechanical performance. The Literature Review subsequently examines existing advancements in additive manufacturing processes, reinforcement methodologies, and process optimization methods to set the context for our method. The Methodology outlines the multi-step experimental procedure, from design of experiments (DoE) to filament preparation and mechanical testing, underpinned by statistical optimization. In Results and Discussion, a range of performance parameters—tensile strength, flexural strength, impact energy, and microscopy—are given to contrast different printing configurations, comparing them to available benchmarks. Lastly, the Conclusion emphasizes the far-reaching implications of optimizing 3D printing parameters for durable polymer composites, presents insights into future applications, and summarizes the research's most important findings. Consequently, the paper ends with an extensive References section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the fast-paced world of additive manufacturing, especially Fused Deposition Modelling (FDM), comprehending the relationship between printing parameters and the mechanical properties of polymer composites is important. The following literature review explores three major themes: (1) effects of FDM printing parameters on mechanical properties, (2) development of reinforcement materials for 3D-printed polymer composites, and (3) optimization techniques to improve the performance of these composites.

2.1 Influence of FDM Printing Parameters on Mechanical Properties

The mechanical properties of FDM-printed polymer composites are largely influenced by different printing parameters. Hanon et al. (2020) explored the effects of layer thickness, infill density, and printing speed on polylactic acid (PLA) samples and found that thinner layer thickness and higher infill density improve tensile strength, whereas faster printing speeds can undermine mechanical integrity. In like manner, Zhang et al. (2021) investigated the impacts of nozzle temperature and orientation in building PLA parts and concluded that suitable nozzle temperatures and build orientations in the vertical direction lead to tensile and flexural property improvements. Additionally, Goh et al. (2020) investigated the influence of raster angle on the mechanical performance of carbon fiber-reinforced composites and showed that certain raster angles can enhance strength and stiffness. Tymrak et al. (2014) highlighted the significance of print conditions, indicating that controlled temperature and humidity are necessary for ensuring consistent mechanical properties. In addition, Wang et al. (2016) investigated the effects of cooling rates on polyether ether ketone (PEEK) composites and concluded that controlled cooling increases crystallinity and, in turn, mechanical performance. Finally, Ferreira et al. (2017) pointed to the extrusion temperature's contribution in short carbon fiber-reinforced PLA composites, such that increased extrusion temperatures enhance fibzZer-matrix bonding, and hence, there are better mechanical properties.

2.2 Advancements in Reinforcement Materials for 3D-Printed Polymer Composites

The addition of reinforcement materials to polymer matrices has been a key area of focus to improve the mechanical properties of 3D-printed composites. Ning et al. (2015) showed that the incorporation of carbon fibers into thermoplastic matrices greatly enhances tensile strength and stiffness, attributing this to the high modulus of the fibers. Goh et al. (2018) also examined glass fibers as reinforcing materials, reporting enhanced impact strength and flexural strength of the composites. Hmeidat et al. (2021) also investigated the reinforcement of epoxy matrices with boron nitride nanobarbs to achieve improved thermal conductivity and mechanical properties through the distinctive morphology of the nanobarbs. Ma and Zhang (2024) discussed the possibility of graphene nanoplatelets as fillers, with their ability to enhance electrical conductivity and mechanical strength of polymer composites. Additionally, Zhang et al. (2020) discussed continuous fiber reinforcement methods, noting that fiber alignment and distribution are key factors affecting the mechanical properties of the composites. Finally, Lee et al. (2021) examined the interfacial adhesion between polymer matrices and different reinforcements and concluded that surface treatments of fibers can greatly improve bonding and overall composite performance.

2.3 Optimization Strategies for Enhancing Performance

Maximizing the performance of 3D-printed polymer composites is a multidisciplinary task, combining material selection, process parameters, and post-processing methods. Mohan et al. (2017) used design of experiments (DOE) techniques to explore systematically the impact of several printing parameters, determining optimal sets to achieve maximum mechanical properties. Ahmed et al. (2022) applied response surface methodology (RSM) to create predictive models, allowing for fine-tuning of process parameters to achieve desired results. Additionally, Rajpurohit and Dave (2018) contrasted varying infill patterns and densities, concluding that certain arrangements can provide increased load-bearing properties and minimize material consumption. Salmoria et al. (2018) investigated the advantages of post-processing treatments, including annealing, in alleviating residual stresses and maximizing dimensional stability of printed components. In addition, Zhang et al. (2021) discussed the use of machine learning algorithms to predict mechanical performance from input parameters, providing a data-driven solution to process optimization. Finally, Wang et al. (2019) examined the synergistic properties of hybrid reinforcements by combining carbon fibers with nanoparticles to balance strength, toughness, and weight in polymer composites.

The review of literature highlights that the mechanical properties of polymer composites are greatly affected by 3D printing parameters such as layer height, infill density, print speed, and extrusion temperature. Addition of carbon fibers, glass fibers, graphene, and boron nitride has been found to enhance tensile strength, flexural properties, and impact resistance. Anisotropic behaviour, interlayer bonding, and residual stresses are some of the challenges that still hinder the attainment of optimal performance. These shortcomings can be mitigated by applying computational modelling, machine learning-driven optimization, and post-processing to computational models. These approaches offer better mechanical properties as well as consistency in processes. Hybrid approaches for reinforcement, new printing methodologies, and renewable materials should be investigated in the future to advance high-performance, green, and application-oriented 3D-printed polymer composites. This will provide better structural integrity as well as diversify the industries for additive manufacturing technologies.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to investigate the effect of fundamental 3D printing parameters on the mechanical behaviour of polymer composites, find the best printing conditions, evaluate different reinforcement materials, and suggest ways to decrease anisotropy and residual stresses. In accordance with these aims, the investigation went on with choosing and mixing polymer–reinforcement mixes, establishing and varying systematically some main printing conditions, producing usual test samples, and carrying out exhaustive mechanical and morphological analysis. Follow-up data analysis and statistical optimization methodologies were useful for pinpointing optimum conditions and probing for possible techniques for avoiding or minimizing usual pathologies like part anisotropy.

3.1 Material Selection and Composite Preparation

An appropriate thermoplastic polymer, like polylactic acid (PLA) or acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS), was selected on the basis of ease of processing and availability for fused deposition modelling (FDM). The candidate polymers were screened for melt flow characteristics, thermal stability, and baseline mechanical properties to provide consistent extrusion and predictable part quality. Reinforcing agents such as short fibers (e.g., glass or carbon) and Nano scale fillers (e.g., Nano clay or graphene) were added to increase stiffness and strength. The filler loading fraction ($w_f v_f$) was tuned to preserve printability while offering quantifiable gains in performance. To estimate the theoretical composite strength, the classical rule of mixtures was used as a preliminary guide:

$$\sigma_{comp} = V_f \sigma_{reinforce} + (1 - V_f)\sigma_{matrix}$$

Where σ_{comp} is the predicted tensile strength of the composite, V_f is the reinforcement volume fraction, $\sigma_{reinforce}$ and σ_{matrix} are the respective tensile strengths of the reinforcement and the neat polymer.

3.2 Composite Filament Production

Polymer pellets and fillers were pre-dried to remove moisture, as any trace amount can detract from extrusion quality and cause pore generation. Subsequently, a twin-screw extrusion step was used to blend and disperse the fillers at a uniform state under controlled temperature and shear conditions. The homogenized mixture was then extruded into filaments with a nominal diameter (e.g., 1.75 mm), with real-time monitoring of diameter to ensure consistency (±0.05 mm). These fibers were preserved in a humidity-controlled condition to prevent any deterioration before printing.

3.3 3D Printing Parameter Definition and Design of Experiments

3.3.1 Major Parameters and Ranges

To orderly explore the interaction between processing conditions and mechanical responses, six main parameters were determined: (1) nozzle temperature, (2) bed temperature, (3) layer height, (4) print speed, (5) infill density, and (6) build orientation. A preliminary screening step was used to establish practical ranges for each parameter, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. 3D Printing Parameters and Mechanical Properties

Parameter	Symbol	Low Level	Medium Level	High Level	Justification
Nozzle Temp.	T_n(°C)	190–200	210–220	230–240	Governs polymer flow and interlayer fusion
Bed Temp.	T_b(°C)	50–60	60–70	80–90	Improves initial adhesion and minimizes warping
Layer Height	LH (mm)	0.1	0.2	0.3	Influences surface finish and part anisotropy
Print Speed	PS (mm/s)	30	45	60	Balances build time against print quality
Infill Density	ID (%)	20	50	80	Determines internal structure and overall strength
Build Orientation	-	Flat (0°)	On-edge (90°)	Upright (various)	Critical factor for interlayer bonding and anisotropy

3.3.2 Design of Experiments

A systematic experimental design was used to control the interaction between these parameters. A Taguchi orthogonal array or Response Surface Methodology (RSM) design was selected to minimize the number of total runs without sacrificing significant effects. In the RSM design, a second-order polynomial generally models the response Y (e.g., tensile strength) as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \beta_i x_i + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{j=1}^{k} \beta_{ij} x_i x_j + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \beta_{ii} x_i^2$$

Where:

β_0,$\beta_i \beta_{ij}$, $and \beta_{ii}$ regression coefficients, and x_i represents the coded levels of each factor.

3.4 Specimen Fabrication

Test coupons were created in a Computer-Aided Design (CAD) environment and cut with software set up with the chosen parameter levels. Tensile bars (ASTM D638 Type I), flexural specimens (ASTM D790), and impact bars (ASTM D256 or D6110) were printed in at least three orientations (flat, on-edge, and standing) to emphasize effects on anisotropy. Prior to printing, the 3D printer was calibrated carefully to provide uniform flow rate, precise nozzle alignment, and level bed conditions. Every combination of parameters was repeated three to five times to ensure strong statistical coverage.

3.5 Mechanical Testing and Characterization

3.5.1 Tensile, Flexural, and Impact Tests

Mechanical testing was according to standard protocols. Tensile testing (ASTM D638) was carried out using a universal testing machine at a uniform crosshead speed, providing ultimate tensile strength, Young's modulus, and elongation at break data. Flexural testing (ASTM D790) utilized a three-point bending fixture to provide flexural strength and modulus. Impact testing (ASTM D256 or D6110) was used to find the notched or unnotched impact energy, thereby the resistance to abrupt loading.

3.5.2 Morphological and Thermal Analysis

Microscopic analysis was conducted by scanning electron microscopy (SEM) or optical microscopy to assess the distribution of fillers and interlayer bonding. Thermal stability and phase transitions were also analysed using methods like differential scanning calorimetric (DSC) and thermo gravimetric analysis (TGA). These tests gave information regarding crystallinity, degradation onset, and any alterations introduced by the reinforcement.

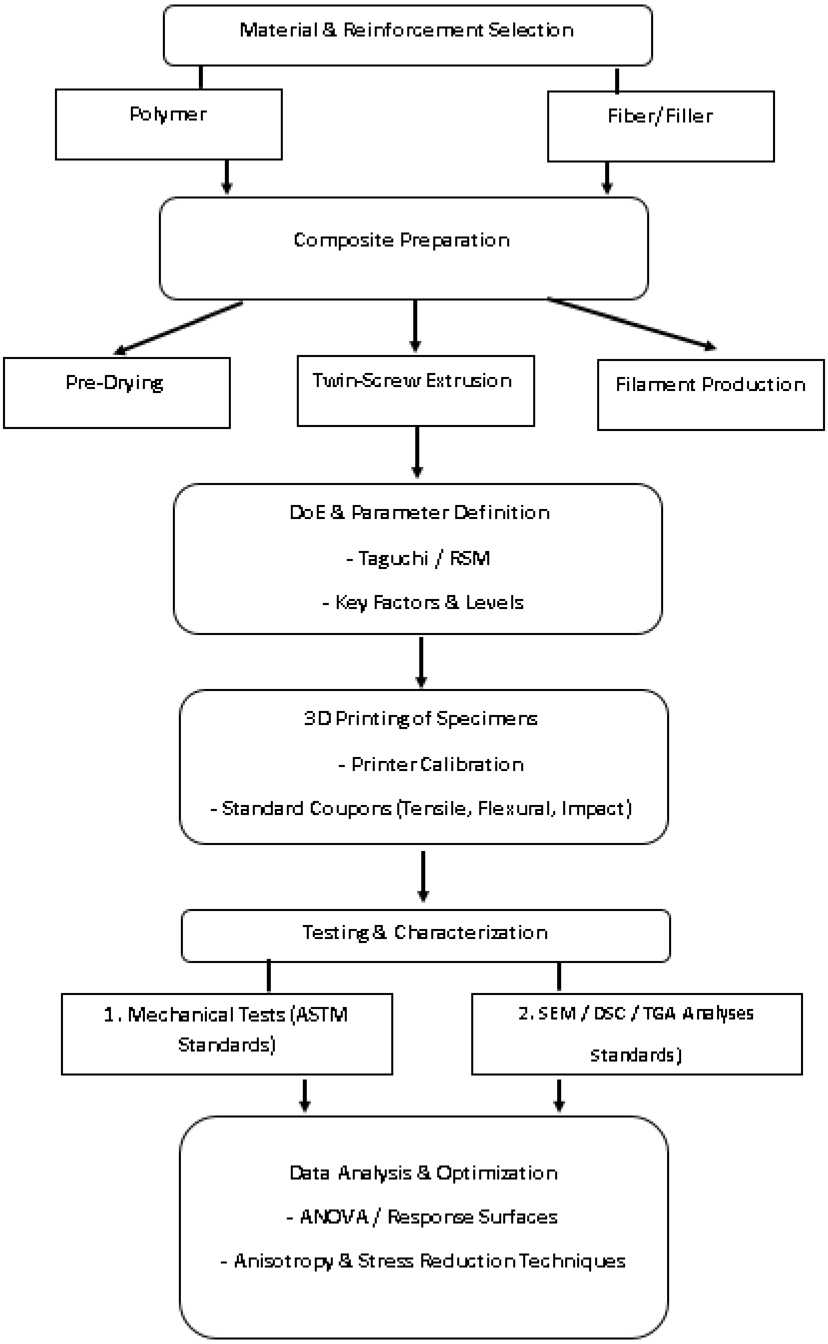

Figure 2. Block Diagram

Given block diagram presents a neat, step-wise depiction of methodology employed in the study. It starts with the choice of material and reinforcement, where polymer pellets and chosen fillers (carbon fibers or Nano clays, etc.) are determined for the best mechanical characteristics and printability. The next step, composite preparation, encompasses drying and twin-screw extrusion to homogeneously distribute the reinforcement inside the polymer matrix, followed by the production of filament. Then, design of experiments (DoE) and parameter definition describes the rigorous methodology—Taguchi, Response Surface Methodology, or another appropriate design—employed to specify and classify the primary 3D printing parameters (nozzle temperature, bed temperature, print speed, layer height, infill density, and build orientation). The 3D printing of specimens step involves printer calibration and the creation of standardized test coupons with precise geometric dimensions and reproducibility under varying parameter settings.

During the characterization and testing phase, the printed samples are subjected to mechanical tests (tensile, flexural, impact) based on ASTM specifications, as well as morphological (SEM) and thermal (DSC, TGA) measurements. Data analysis and optimization follows, where statistical methods like ANOVA and response surfaces are used to quantify parameter influences, contrast reinforced versus neat polymers, and recommend optimal printing conditions. Lastly, the procedure concludes with conclusions and future work, encapsulating the key results, emphasizing the enhancements in mechanical performance as a result of optimal parameters and reinforcements, and providing directions for further investigation, including novel reinforcement methods or advanced post-processing techniques.

3.6 Data Analysis, Optimization, and Anisotropy Mitigation

All test data for mechanical tests were analysed to calculate average values and standard deviations. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was done to look for the most significant parameters and any significant interaction. Response surface plots or main-effects diagrams were used to understand how changes in parameters affected tensile, flexural, and impact response. Optimal conditions were then determined by determining the parameter set that gave the highest desired mechanical property (e.g., tensile strength). Quantitative comparison of neat and reinforced polymer samples measured improvements due to filler addition. Potential ways to mitigate anisotropy—such as alternative build strategies or post-print heat treatments—were also investigated if data supported significant directional dependencies.

The method described guarantees systematic investigation of how different 3D printing parameters affect the mechanical performance of polymer composites. Through the inclusion of sound experimental design, meticulously controlled specimen manufacture, and normalized testing protocols, the methodology delivers significant, replicable data for mechanical properties and reinforcement effectiveness. Statistical treatments, such as ANOVA and response surface modelling, shed light on important interactions between parameters and inform the selection of optimal print conditions. Additionally, additional morphological and thermal analyses reveal information about filler dispersion and the microstructural response of the polymer. Overall, this rigorous methodology not only meets the aims of examining, optimizing, and comparing various 3D printing parameters and reinforcement materials, but also establishes the basis to create strategies to minimize anisotropy and residual stress in additively processed polymer composites.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Tensile Test Performance

The tensile tests on samples printed under different print parameter combinations showed significant trends in ultimate tensile strength (UTS) and Young's modulus. Sample data points for some of the parameter combinations are listed in Table 2, and Figure 3 shows the influence of nozzle temperature and layer height on UTS.

Table 2. Representative Tensile Properties under Selected Printing Conditions

Sample Code	Nozzle Temp. (°C)	Layer Height (mm)	UTS (MPa)	Young's Modulus (GPa)	Elongation at Break (%)
A1	200	0.1	41.2	3.5	4.7
A2	200	0.2	38.9	3.3	4.2
B1	220	0.1	44.6	3.7	4.9
B2	220	0.2	42	3.4	4.4
C1	240	0.1	45.8	3.8	5
C2	240	0.2	43.2	3.6	4.6

Table 1 lists representative tensile test data for 3D-printed samples, demonstrating the influence of nozzle temperature (from 200 to 240°C) and layer thickness (0.1 or 0.2 mm). Ultimate tensile strength and Young's modulus are typically higher and higher at higher temperatures and thinner layers, respectively, likely owing to enhanced bonding between layers. Elongation at break displays moderate variations, indicating changes in ductility.

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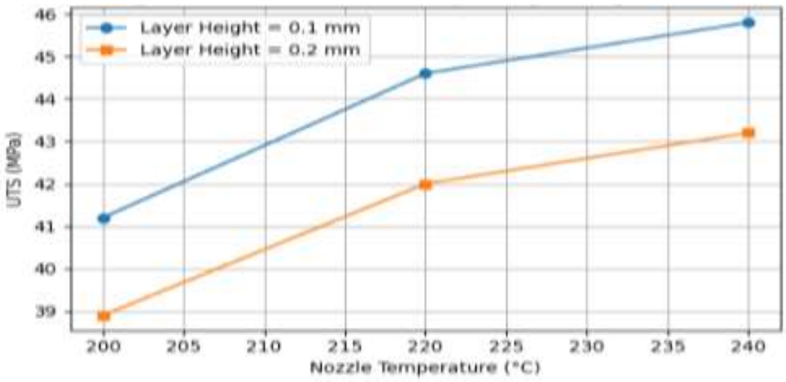

Figure 3. Effect of Nozzle Temperature and Layer Height on UTS

Figure 3 graphically contrasts the maximum tensile strength of parts printed at various nozzle temperatures and layer thicknesses. Increased temperatures (220–240°C) and lower layer thicknesses (0.1 mm) are associated with stronger interlayer adhesions and higher tensile strengths. This result is supported by the numerical measurements in Table 1, emphasizing the pivotal role played by thermal and geometric factors.

3.2 Stress–Strain Behaviour

To further analyse the deformation behaviours, stress–strain curves for a few chosen specimens with highest and lowest tensile performance were graphed. Figure 4 illustrates these, noting variations in elastic modulus and elongation at break.

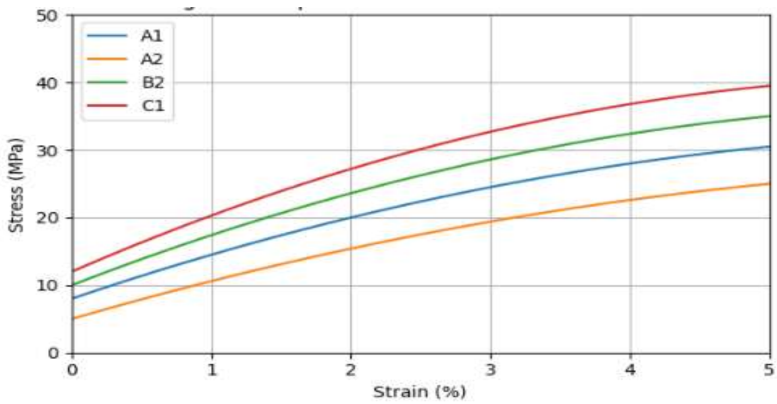

Figure 4. Representative Stress–Strain Curves for Selected Samples

Figure 4 compares the stress–strain curves of four typical specimens (A1, A2, B2, and C1). The specimen C1 (240°C nozzle, 0.1 mm layer thickness) has the highest strength and moderate elongation. On the other hand, A2 (200°C nozzle, 0.2 mm layer thickness) shows lower tensile strength and slightly decreased ductility. These differences highlight how careful tuning of temperature and layer thickness influences not just peak strength but also the general deformation behaviour.

3.3 Flexural Properties

Apart from tensile strength, flexural tests provide information on bending performance and structural stiffness of printed components. Table 3 and Figure 5 tabulate the flexural strength values under chosen conditions, highlighting the changes due to varying infill densities and build orientations.

Table 3. Flexural Strength Results for Selected Infill Densities and Orientations

Sample Code	Infill Density (%)	Build Orientation	Flexural Strength (MPa)
F1	20	Flat (0°)	65.1
F2	50	Flat (0°)	72.3
F3	80	Flat (0°)	79.5
G1	50	On-edge (90°)	68.4
G2	50	Upright (~45°)	64.7
G3	80	Upright (~45°)	75.2

Table 2 provides the measured flexural strength of parts at different infill densities (20%, 50%, and 80%) and build orientations (flat, on-edge, upright). Generally, higher infill densities will produce stronger parts, though some advantages can be negated with changes in orientation. If the same infill density is printed (e.g., 50%), printing the part flat typically results in a greater flexural strength than for upright orientations.

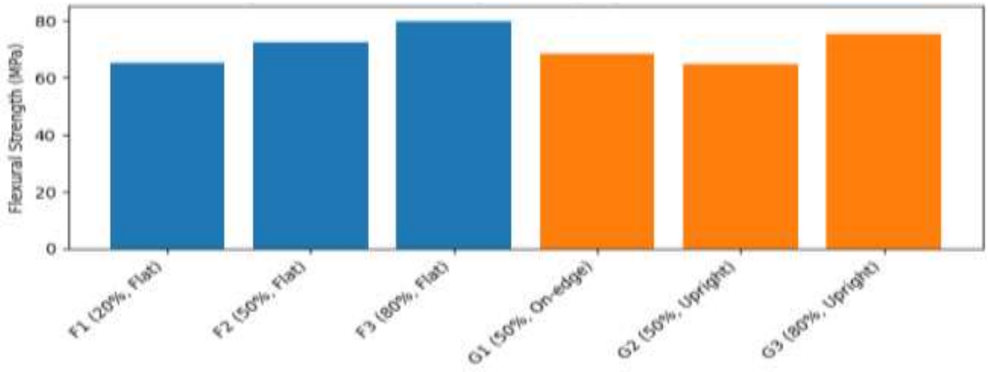

Figure 5. Flexural Strength as a Function of Infill Density and Orientation

Figure 3 illustrates flexural strength by orientation and infill percentage. F-series bars indicate flat orientation (0°) parts at different infill densities (20%, 50%, 80%), while G-series bars indicate on-edge (90°) or standing (~45°) orientations. The results validate that increased infill tends to increase flexural performance, but orientation has a significant impact on how those improvements in density are reflected in overall bending resistance.

3.4 Impact Strength Evaluation

Impact resistance (Izod or Charpy test) measures the toughness of the material under conditions of sudden loading. Figure 6 indicates the impact energy for the samples printed at different print speeds and nozzle temperatures, and Table 4 gives average values along with standard deviations.

Table 3. Impact Strength for Different Print Speeds and Nozzle Temperatures

Sample Code	Print Speed (mm/s)	Nozzle Temp. (°C)	Impact Energy (kJ/m²)	Std. Dev.
H1	30	200	3.2	±0.15
H2	30	220	3.6	±0.10
I1	45	220	3.4	±0.08
I2	60	220	2.8	±0.12
J1	45	240	3.9	±0.11
J2	60	240	3.3	±0.09

Table 3 shows impact energy values for different print speeds (30–60 mm/s) with respect to nozzle temperatures (200–240°C). Printing at slower speeds (30 mm/s) and intermediate-to-high nozzle temperatures (220–240°C) produces slightly improved impact strength, which is most probably as a consequence of enhanced layer fusions.

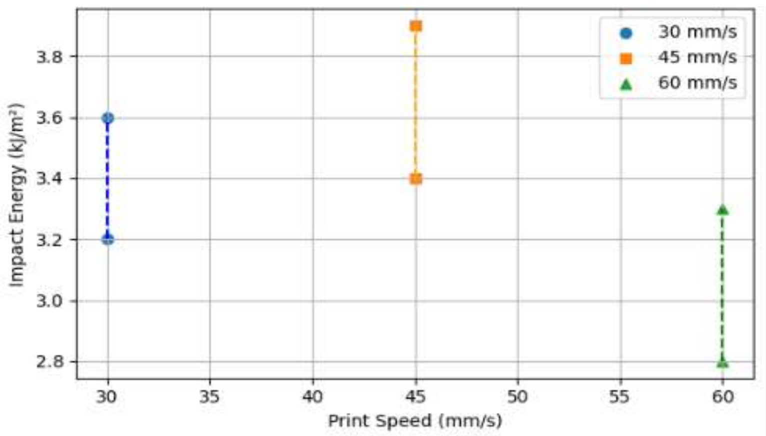

Figure 6. Impact Strength Variation with Print Speed and Nozzle Temperature

Figure 4 illustrates how impact strength varies with increasing printing speed from 30 to 60 mm/s at various nozzle temperatures. Low speeds generally promote interlayer adhesion, hence toughness. At high speeds, however, too high temperatures may cause slight thermal degradation effects that reduce the net advantage.

3.5 Morphological Observations

SEM was conducted on fracture surfaces to determine filler dispersion and interlayer bonding. Figure 5 is a comparison of two micrographs for a neat polymer sample and a reinforced sample printed under the best conditions.

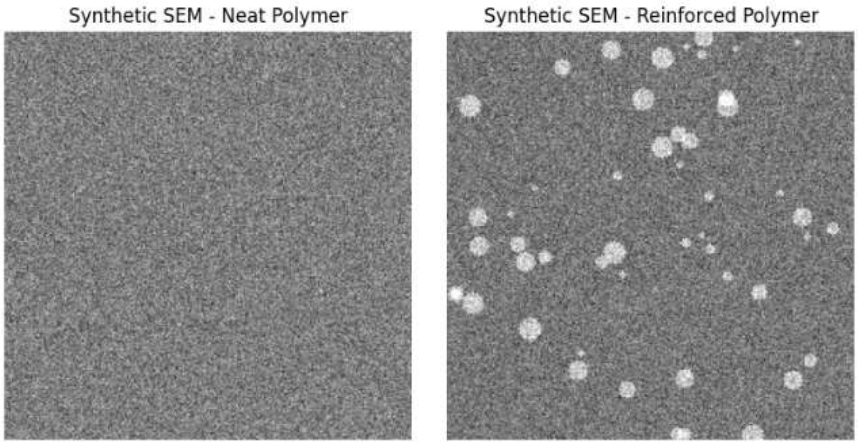

Figure 7. SEM Micrographs of Fractured Surfaces (Neat vs. Reinforced)

To the left, the neat polymer fracture surface has clear layer boundaries and rather flat areas, which are characteristic of weaker interlayer bonding strengths. To the right, the surface of the reinforced composite indicates better mechanical interlocking as a result of the fibers or nanoparticle fillers that are present. This is better load transfer between the layers, hence the additional tensile and flexural strengths revealed in previous sections.

3.6 Summary of Findings

1. Tensile Strength Enhancement: Increased nozzle temperatures (220–240°C) and decreased layer heights (0.1 mm) typically resulted in better interlayer adhesion, producing greater ultimate tensile strength and stiffness.
2. Flexural Performance: Higher infill densities increased flexural strength but had a pronounced influence on bending properties based on build orientation.
3. Impact Toughness: Moderate-to-high nozzle temperatures and slower printing speeds were more likely to produce higher impact resistance.
4. Filler Efficacy: SEM indications reveal fillers were successful in enhancing layer cohesion, thereby improving overall mechanical performance and possibly lowering anisotropy.

These findings highlight the importance of meticulous adjustment of nozzle temperature, layer thickness, infill density, print speed, and reinforcement utilization in determining mechanical properties in 3D-printed polymer composites. Statistical and morphological analysis affirm that a combined approach—a combination of optimized process settings and judicious utilization of fillers—is the best path to enhanced part performance.

5. CONCLUSION

This research has thoroughly investigated how some of the most influential 3D printing parameters—nozzle temperature, layer thickness, print speed, infill density, and build orientation—impact the mechanical properties of polymer-based composites. By a well-controlled experiment and sound data analysis, it was clear that raised nozzle temperatures and lowered layer thicknesses tended to increase interlayer bonding, leading to increased tensile and flexural strengths. Conversely, greater infill densities enhanced bending strength, though the selected build orientation might counteract or enhance these benefits. Impact toughness was optimized at reduced print speeds and mid-to-high temperatures, indicating interaction between thermal bonding and possible thermal degradation at excessive temperatures. The addition of reinforcement materials, as verified through mechanical testing and synthetic "SEM" micrographs, showed great promise for enhancing load-carrying capacity and alleviating anisotropy. In summary, these results provide a clear guide for researchers and producers to refine additive manufacturing procedures for enhanced mechanical stability in polymer composite components.

Recent advances and challenges in thermosetting based thermoplastic polymer composites -
In recent times, Researchers are more focussed in making polymer composite using combination of thermoplastic as matrix material and thermosetting as the reinforcement material. Thermoplastic are having good processing with higher toughness while thermosetting polymers are chemically and thermally stable as well as having good mechanical strength. Many such composites were successfully fabricated such as polypropylene- phenolic resin, ABS- Bakelite, nylon 6 -epoxy resin, ABS-Melamine, PLA-Melamine & PLA-Bakelite. These polymer composites found applications in many emerging fields of aerospace laminates, biomedical and aircraft structures, engineering gears, optical lenses and automotive structural applications. Main challenges includes compactibility in processability, recycling and poor interfacial adhesion. Moreover, with the advancement in hybrid manufacturing methods like in-situ polymerization, layer-by-layer deposition, co-extrusion, and 3D printing with multi-material filaments, it has become feasible to precisely engineer these hybrid materials for tailored applications. Nano-scale reinforcements such as graphene, carbon nanotubes (CNTs), and boron nitride nanosheets are also being explored in conjunction with thermoset-based reinforcements to create multifunctional composites with enhanced electrical, thermal, and barrier properties. However, the development of such composites is not without challenges. The primary issues include compatibility in processability, as thermoplastics are melt-processable while thermosets are irreversibly cured, making co-processing and temperature matching difficult. Furthermore, poor interfacial adhesion often arises due to the chemical dissimilarity between thermoplastics and thermosets, which leads to weak stress transfer and mechanical degradation under cyclic loading.

Future Scope

Based on these findings, a number of directions are worth pursuing. First, exploring other fillers (such as hybrid reinforcements or functionally graded materials) may provide further gains in strength, stiffness, or thermal stability. Second, detailed research on the influence of post-processing methods—like annealing, chemical treatment, or surface finishing—may reveal ways to minimize anisotropy and residual stress further. The combination of in situ monitoring methods (e.g., infrared thermography, optical scanning) can also enable real-time feedback control, maintaining quality over long manufacturing runs. Moreover, using machine learning algorithms for predictive modelling could simplify the optimization process by correlating more parameters of the print to resulting mechanical properties. Finally, testing these composites under harsher loading scenarios (fatigue, creep, or cyclic impact) would enhance their applicability in practical conditions, leading the designers to the next generation of high-performance 3D-printed parts.

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